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ABSTRACT

Connecting visual and print literacies in the classroom can bridge distances in students' experiences, because all literacies are complementary and interdependent. This article discusses this rationale for connecting students' communication experiences in and out of classrooms to foster relevant literacies needed in contemporary society. Next it identifies common literacy principles, textual structures, and reader processes that print advertisements and content area texts. It then explains an analytic method called Deep Viewing, which consists of three levels--literal observation, interpretation and evaluation/application--that can be applied to both types of texts. The following code categories that guide viewers through interpretive and applied/evaluation levels of Deep Viewing are described: sequence and structure; semes and forms; language and discourse; proximity and spacing; culture and context; and effects and production. Twenty-two additional classroom activities to connect and extend students' literacies are offered. Finally, the benefits of connecting literacy principles, textual structures, and reader processes through the use of print advertisements and academic texts are discussed. These include: (1) students demonstrate high levels of motivation, interest, and social interaction; (2) following initial analysis, new critical insights are fostered during subsequent readings of academic texts; (3) student curiosity may be sparked, which can lead to self-initiated learning; and (4) students are assisted in forging cohesive understandings and developing sound literacy strategies for all modern media and communications environments. (Contains 24 references.) (AEF)

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Questing Toward Cohesion: Connecting Advertisements And Classroom Reading Through Visual Literacy

by Ann Watts Pailliotet

Abstract

This article has four purposes. First, it offers a rationale for connecting students' communication experiences in and out of classrooms to foster relevant literacies needed in contemporary society. Second, it shows how print advertisements and academic print texts share content, structural elements, and reader/viewer processes. Third, it details a method for analyzing print advertisements and academic content area texts. Last, it offers 22 instructional practices to foster cohesive literacy strategies and relevant understandings for students and educators.

Questing Toward Cohesion: Why We Should Connect Commercials and Content Area Reading in Our Classrooms

Although literacy development occurs in interdependent social systems that transcend classroom barriers (Emig, 1983; McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988), students and teachers often see schools and society as separate communicational worlds (Bianculli, 1992; Pope, 1993). Many educators still teach content area reading using only traditional print texts, ignoring mass media, and divorcing instruction from larger social contexts. But modern literacy is no longer a matter of comprehending only the printed or spoken word. Individuals must also be able to understand and critically analyze sophisticated visual information in films, videos, textbooks, computer environments, magazines, television, and life settings, as well as in academic texts.

Students come to our classrooms with rich background knowledge gained from varied communicational experiences. The average high school student has spent more time watching television than in school (Lutz,1989) and countless hours viewing films, videos, magazines, computer games, comics, art, and billboards. Students are also continually exposed to electronic and print commercial advertisements. Ignoring these social experiences is counterproductive to literacy learning. Effective literacy instruction (Reutzel & Cooter, 1992) and content area reading (Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1996) build on students' background knowledge, gained in classrooms and outside of them. Since teachers (and students) bring a wealth of background knowledge about mass media to academic settings, it makes sense to build upon this knowledge and connect it to classroom literacy learning.

Connecting visual and print literacies in the classroom bridges distances in students' experiences, because all literacies are complementary and interdependent (Neuman, 1991). Visual and print texts share many common structural elements like signification (Bopry, 1994; Saint-Martin, 1990), use of images (Pettersson, 1992), textual patterns and levels of meaning (Herber & Herber, 1993; Kervin, 1985) and rhetorical devices (Ohlgren & Berk, 1977) which convey explicit and tacit ideologies (Althusser, 1986; Giroux, 1993). When a person "reads" mass media, s/he is also engaging in many processes that parallel those required to understand print text, like previewing, metacognitive decision-making, and active response. Processes of visual literacy reinforce (Lusted, 1991) and extend traditional print reading and writing skills (Sinatra, 1986), support current theories like whole language (Fehlman, 1996), further literacy pedagogy (Kellner, 1988; Witkin, 1994), and foster critical thinking (Semali, 1994).

This article identifies common literacy principles, textual structures, and reader processes that print advertisements and content area texts share. Next, it explains an analytic method called Deep Viewing that can be applied to both types of texts. Last, it offers 22 additional classroom activities to connect and extend students' literacies.

When students are able to articulate and apply literacy strategies shared by diverse media and situations, learning becomes more relevant. Pairing print advertisements with content reading bridges experiences in

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classrooms and society (Considine & Haley, 1992), assisting individuals to develop useful literacy skills and create critical, cohesive understandings of contemporary communication.

Common Principles, Content and Literacy Processes of Popular and Classroom Texts

Researchers, theorists, and practitioners in fields of reading, literacy development, composition, literary response, and communications identify many principles, textual structures, and literacy processes that all modern texts share. These are described next.

Common Principles

Many forms of communication are worthy of study and analysis. These include oral, electronic, and popular texts, as well as cultural events.

- The reader/viewer is not a passive recipient of information but actively engages in transactions with a text to create meaning.
- Many meanings are possible as readers/viewers interact with texts and construct meaning from them. There are levels of understanding from explicit and literal to implicit/interpretative and applied.
- Understanding texts is a recursive and ongoing process, not linear or static. These understandings are developed through past and present experiences and *not* developed in isolation, but arise within social contexts.
- Literacy environments in and out of school are intimately linked and interdependent.
- Textual understandings involve many human responses including emotions, intellect and metacognitive awareness, the ability to know and apply various strategies
- Strategies and understandings developed in one form of communication interact with and support others. Reading, writing, speaking, listening *and* viewing are interdependent.
- All forms of media arise within specific cultures or ideologies. Analysis of media may be used to promote multicultural awareness and critical thinking.
- Rhetorical analyses of textual elements like audience, narratives, or context may be used to promote understandings in all forms of media.

Common Textual Structures, Elements and Content

All texts -- whether print, electronic, or situational -- share common elements, including genres, plots and structures , images and metaphors , and the use of signs and symbols. Students encounter the following shared **content** in commercials and content area texts:

- Sequencing
- Imagery
- Expository textual patterns
- Persuasive techniques
- Narrative structures
- Textual patterns of organization
- Cultural biases in illustrations and text
- Information
- Introduction of new langauge or vocabulary
- Fact vs. opinion
- Paragraph structure
- Attention devices like bold print, use of spacing, and color
- Illustrations
- Word choice of verbs, adjectives, nouns ,etc.
- Organizational elements like headings, titles, sections
- Graphs and charts
- Sentence structure and grammar
- Textual evidence
- Omissions of content or ideas
- Implicit/explicit themes and values
- Superordinate and subordinate ideas
- Rhetorical structures and devices
- Point of view
- Construction of explicit and implicit themes through language and imagery
- Use of qualifying statements
- Use of statistics and numerical references
- Use of jargon that evokes specific cultural discourses
- Illustrations, art and other visual information

Common Literacy Processes

Many literacy skills and processes are needed to understand any text. Students engage in the following **processes** when they read commercials and content area texts:

- Previewing
- Skimming
- Activating schema
- Drawing on background knowledge and prior understandings
- Making choices about the importance

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and veracity of information
- •Observing textual elements
- •Sorting and Selecting
- •Retaining and Remembering
- •Analyzing and Evaluating
- •Identifying levels of meaning
- •Reading explicit information and subtexts
- •Employing guiding questions
- •Identifying themes
- •Looking for biases
- •Identifying and analyzing arguments
- •Recalling, retelling, remembering
- •Comparing and contrasting
- •Identifying and citing textual evidence
- •Distinguishing among superordinate and subordinate ideas
- •Recognizing and expressing personal response
- •Critically analyzing rhetorical devices
- •Using multiple modalities to understand meanings and articulate responses to them
- •Using graphic organizers to structure information (e.g. venn diagrams, semantic webbing, intersected lists, herringbones, etc)
- •Metacognition: Employing varied comprehension strategies
- •Comprehending unfamiliar words
- •Learning new vocabulary
- •Distinguishing among fact and fiction
- •Noting missing information
- •Responding through visual, written, and oral means

The Deep Viewing Process: Connecting Literacies

Postman (1985) points out that contemporary individuals are bombarded with visual information but have few ways to understand or act on what they see. The Deep Viewing Method provides a systematic process for analyzing, understanding, and interacting with visual information. It combines a heuristic framework (e.g. Lusted,1991), semiotic codes for understanding print and visual information (Barthes,1974; Saint-Martin, 1990), and three leveled comprehension models (Herber & Herber, 1993; Himley, 1991) to help participants reach understandings of visual information.

Deep Viewing builds on common literacy principles, content and processes. It offers a way to "read" and analyze print commercial advertisements. Its strategies may then be applied to understandings of content area textbooks.

Using advertisements as a basis to develop critical awareness of visual information and literacy skills may have several benefits. First, students and teachers are familiar with commercials. Additionally, print advertisements are readily available, connect literacy environments of home and school, contain many of the same elements and devices found in text books, and serve as an interesting, confidence-building means to develop students' and teachers' strategies for understanding print information. Furthermore, many states now mandate specific curricular goals that require the teaching and learning of critical media analysis (e.g., New York, Washington). In sum, beginning with visual analysis of print commercials and then applying these strategies to academic texts may help students and teachers to develop cohesive understandings of the meanings, structures and content not only of textbooks, but of all communicational environments in which they live.

Procedures for Deep Viewing: Code Categories

When Deep Viewing, participants begin analysis at literal, observational levels, then progress through interpretative and applied /evaluative levels using the following code categories to guide inquiry:

Sequence and Structure

This code notes the sequence of visual material on the page and the structure(s) of the print text. It answers, "In what order is information presented? How does sequence and structure of presentation influence meaning?"

Semes and Forms

Semes are units of visual meaning that create symbols. This code examines objects and people. It describes colors, textures, shapes, symbols, or repeated objects, and dress and physical traits of people. It answers, "What objects and people do we see? What are the characteristics of these people and objects? What meanings do these people and objects have for us?"

Language and Discourse

This code focuses on words and phrases that may sum up main ideas or themes, repeated language, language that seems out of place or unfamiliar, and possible meanings of language. It answers, "What language is used? What does this language mean?"

Proximity and Spacing

This code examines use of space and relations of objects in the text. It examines dimensions, relative sizes, and numbers of objects on the page, use of empty space, as well as indications of movement like gestures, arrows, or other symbols (vectorality). It answers, "How is space used? How does this use of space influence meaning?"

Culture and Context

This code situates the text in particular times and cultures. It notes symbolic or linguistic references to cultural knowledge, like images or terminology that pertain to science, art, academic disciplines, or popular culture. It answers, "What social knowledge is referred to? What is implied? What is assumed? What is missing?"

Effects and Production

This code examines devices and elements that are used in the text. It answers, "Who created this text? Why? What elements assist or prevent us from understanding it?"

Deep Viewing may be done individually, in pairs (participants progress through questions and levels), or collaboratively (participants each take a code and report to whole group at the end of each level using a Jigsaw II approach). Participants may respond through written notes, oral discussion or use of diagrams and pictures as they view.

Level One: Literal Observation

The purpose of this level is to gather as much information as possible for analysis. Describe only what you see ("a slim woman in a red dress") and avoid interpretative ("She's sexy.") or evaluative comments at this stage. ("This is sexist.")

Look at the text and answer the following questions:

Sequence and Structure:

In what order or sequence is the information presented?
What do I see first, second, third, etc.?

Semes and Forms:

Who is pictured?
What is pictured?
What are the characteristics of people and objects?

Language and Discourse:

What type of language is used? Is it formal, informal, or a mix?
Is there terminology I don't know?
Are there repeated words? Words that share similar meanings? Words that have opposite meanings?

Proximity and Spacing:

How is space used? Note the relationships on the page.
Is there more print or visual information?
Are objects/people pictured alone or in groups?
Note dimensions. Are some objects bigger than others?
Do the objects and people appear to be still? Are they moving? If so, how?

Culture and Context:

What symbols or language do I notice first?
What do I have to know to understand these symbols and language? (e.g., that caps and gowns symbolize education or doctors use stethoscopes)

Effects and Production:

What production devices and elements do the creators of the text use? (angles, fonts, artistic devices)
What clues are there that guide the way I process and understand this text?
(Uses of words like, 'first, second, third'? Bold print, highlighted passages, repeated images or colors?)

Level Two: Interpretation

The purpose of this level is to explore and construct a range of understandings about the text, the reader, and the situation. Participants now interpret the information they have gathered. They may summarize ideas, create hypotheses, connect information on the page with past and present experiences, identify and describe their strategies of analysis, and express feelings and understandings of the text. Questions to assist in these processes include:

Sequence and Structure:

What is the structure of this text?
Does it tell a story? Present an argument?
List information? Compare and contrast?
Show a problem and solution? Cause and effect?
How do you know?

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What parts of the text create (or lack) sequence and structure?

Semes and Forms:
What do you think or feel when you see the objects and people pictured?
Where else have you seen these types of objects and people?
What are the most important objects or people here? How do you know?
List or discuss associations you make when you see these objects and people.
What messages does this text explicitly convey?
What messages does this text implicitly convey?

Language and Discourse:
Is there language in this text that is unfamiliar to you?
Does the language create more than one meaning for you? What are these meanings?
What sorts of feelings and ideas do you have when you read this language?
What language seems most important? Why?
What topic or topics does this text present? How do you know?
Are the language, topics, and ideas in this text used only by certain people or in certain situations?

Proximity and Spacing:
How is space used in this text?
What meanings do use of space have for you?
What meanings do big (or small) objects have?
What meanings do groupings vs. isolated objects have?
What meanings do its images of movement or stillness have?

Culture and Context:
What would you need to know in order to understand this text?
Who would know and not know this information?
Who is being addressed in this text?
How are they being addressed?
Who/what is missing or not pictured?
Who is not being addressed?
Are the forms of address and knowledge in this text part of larger cultural beliefs and practices?

Effects and Production:
Close your eyes and recall what you've seen. What do you remember? Why?
What devices are used to capture your attention and help you remember information?
Where have you seen these devices used before?
Who created in this text? How can you tell?
What are they trying to communicate to you?

Level Three: Evaluation and Application

The purpose of this level is to apply and evaluate strategies and ideas made explicit in the first two levels. Now participants should discuss how they might apply what they have discovered to other situations and texts. They may also evaluate the text and the ways they understand it.

Sequence and Structure:
Where else have you seen the sequence(s) and structure(s) you found in this text?
Is the structure of the text appropriate for the purposes and information presented?
What do you do when the structure of the text is unclear?

Semes and Forms:
Do the objects and people presented fit the textual message?
Do they appear in other texts?
Do these images convey purposes and ideas you feel are important?
Do they convey hidden or undesirable messages?

Language and Discourse:
What language is unfamiliar? Why don't you understand it?
How can you learn (or teach) what it means?
Is the language appropriate for the topic and audience?

Proximity and Spacing:
Why do you think the authors used this spacing?
What implicit and explicit messages do they convey through their use of space?

Culture and Context:
Who and what does this text include or exclude?
Is it culturally biased? If so, how? How would you address this problem?

Production Effects:
Is this text visually effective? Why or why not?
Does it fulfill it purpose?
Is it considerate of its audience?
If you were to redesign this text, what changes would you make? Why? would you use?

Questing Toward Cohesion: 22 Ways to Connect Visual and Print Literacies

After engaging in Deep Viewing analysis of print advertisements, teachers and students may engage in additional activities that foster visual and print literacies.

Below are 22 ideas to help create cohesive content reading and literacy instruction.

1) Ask students to brainstorm elements that textbooks and advertisements share. List responses on charts, a computer data base, or handouts for future reference. Guiding questions include:

- •In what ways do textbooks and advertisements structure information? (print, visual diagrams, illustrations, etc.)
- •What patterns of print text do they share? (e.g. problem/solution, cause/effect, listing, compare/contrast, definitions, persuasive vs. descriptive, expository or narrative)
- •What structures do they use to organize information? (e.g., titles, diagrams, context clues)
- •What symbols do textbooks and advertisements share? (Use of certain colors, illustrations, images)
- •What types of language do they use?
- •What cultural knowledge do they require?
- •How do they use space? (Flow charts, diagrams, larger and smaller pictures, borders and gutters, chapter or section dividers)
- •What devices do they use to explain ideas? (Bold print, charts, margin notes, graphic organizers, summaries, guiding questions)
- •How do we know what ideas in a text are most important? (Relate to Deep Viewing categories: sequence in which material is presented, semes and forms, repeated language and terms, proximity and spacing in texts, references to cultural or prior knowledge, production devices like bold print or highlighted spaces)

2) Through modelling, show how text books and advertisements share elements. Teacher and/or students identify common structural patterns, images, devices like bold print, or language.

For example, use an advertisement that has a listing structure. Ask students to identify its "signal words" like "first," "second," and "third," then to find examples in their texts as they read. Make a chart of signal words that students add to as they read.

3) After demonstrating a Deep Viewing think aloud with an advertisement, teacher repeats process on a page or chapter of a textbook to promote critical awareness of content, structures and metacognitive strategies.

4) Students perform a Deep View analysis on a text book passage. Listing and posting strategies they used to analyze the text may be helpful when they engage in content area reading.

5) Create an advertisement of a topic in a textbook or work of literature (e.g. A political advertisement for a historical figure, a commercial for a new scientific product, a public service announcement that addresses an issue raised in the classroom text).

6) Write a "textbook" summary of information presented in an advertisement. This is an excellent way to help students think critically about what information is presented and missing in a text and to promote awareness of linguistic conventions.

7) Use Deep Viewing of advertisements as a spring board to discuss differences between fact and opinion, persuasive techniques, or social issues like gender bias or racism.

8) Teachers use Deep Viewing process to evaluate textbooks or other educational materials.

9) Ask students to create a story board or story frame for an advertisement that has a narrative structure. Narrative structures are often used in "testimonial" advertisements for medicines, diet aids or financial planning. Compare and contrast narrative structure of an advertisement (setting, characters, plot, conflict, resolution) with a story framed piece of literature.

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10) Students create print advertisement campaign for content area topic or literature. In groups, they first identify theme or main topic citing evidence from the text. Then, they create a logo, slogan, and print copy.

11) Students create "advertisement" study guide for content text. They must highlight important information and create an advertisement that convinces readers why and how to read it. This process is similar to a reading roadmap, which improves content learning and metacognitive skills.

12) To reinforce reading comprehension and writing skills, ask students to write a paragraph from an advertisement in which they identify the main topic or superordinate idea as well as supporting (subordinate ideas). Repeat same exercise with content area text.

13) Students examine language and images in advertisements for explicit or implicit cultural, gender, or racial biases, propaganda techniques, or persuasive strategies. Extend these observations to analysis of textbooks or secondary sources. For example, note what is missing from an advertisement. List the questions that students ask as they analyze. Use these same questions to identify point of view or biases in textbooks. Ask students to write persuasive and informational texts using strategies they find in advertisements.

14) Point of view/target audience. Students analyze advertisement to identify target audience. Stress that they must provide textual evidence for their findings. Ask them to rewrite advertisement for another audience and explain their choices of language and imagery. Tie to point of view and audience in literature lesson by asking them to note evidence for point of view and their responses.

15) Promote metacognitive skills through strategy lists and reading roadmaps. As students and teachers analyze advertisements, list comprehension strategies they used (previewing, compare/contrast, rereading, etc.). Refer and apply to these lists to content reading.

16) Effective writing and vocabulary development. Students analyze advertisements for powerful words and images. They then revise drafts of their own writing using words and strategies used during analysis.

17) Class thesauri or word banks. As students find new or effective language and imagery in commercials, they note on poster, board, in journals, or through electronic data base; they then refer to their findings when writing and reading future texts.

18) Tying texts. Students create a print or computerized data bank of common images /rhetorical strategies found in commercials and their images. Throughout the year, they add to the list as they encounter these same images in literary or content texts. (e.g., contrast of light and darkness in language or illustration; construction of arguments or narratives.)

19) Qualifying statements, "weasel" words or hyperbole. Students identify these uses of language in advertisements and list them on a classroom chart. As they read, reward them for finding the same language in their textbooks and list examples they find. Discuss if these words convey fact or opinion. Also refer to the classroom chart during writing assignments. These examples show students what not to do. Provide examples of effective writing strategies beside negative examples.

20) Study of statistics and graphs. Use these elements in advertisements to help students and evaluate understand information in math, science, or social studies texts.

21) Students collect advertisements that reflect persuasive strategies for folders or bulletin boards. They then analyze speeches, current events or their texts for these strategies.

22) Students use a graphic organizer to structure information in an advertisement and then use same strategies when reading content texts (e,g., a venn diagram to compare 2 texts, a herringbone to answer who, what, where, when, how and why; a semantic web to articulate and extend background knowledge).

Conclusion

Based on informal observations in my own

high school and college classrooms, I have found that connecting literacy principles, textual structures, and reader processes through use of print advertisements and academic texts appears to have several benefits.

First, students demonstrate many positive affective outcomes, like high levels of motivation, interest, and social interaction. For example, each time I have introduced critical analysis of textbooks in preservice literacy methods courses through an initial collaborative examination of print commercials, students became so involved that they were reluctant to leave when the class session was over. Second, initial analysis of print commercials appears to foster new critical insights during subsequent readings of academic texts. Many of my high school students retained and extended the skills learned during commercial analysis. As the semester progressed, it became like a game for many to find and share "weasel words,"signal words, instances of persuasive strategies, as well as to rate effective, ineffective, or biased visual information in their textbooks. In particular, I find that after analyzing commercials, students learn to look past what is on the page and to note missing points of view or information. Many continue to allude to biases or underrepresentation they first found in commercials during successive readings of class texts. Recently, my preservice teachers noted a Whole Language bias in one of their books, citing specific textual evidence like relative use of space and sequencing of topics, diagrams, and descriptive language. Others have identified gender stereotyping and underrepresentation of ethnic groups in children's literature. One explained, "I caught it because the texts and pictures are like the ads we looked at."

Third, connecting commercials to content area texts may spark curiosity and lead to self-initiated learning. Last semester, several of my students embarked on a lengthy examination of gender biases in classrooms and instructional materials after their interest was piqued by their noticing a lack of women in advertisements for financial planning and business travel.

Next, I believe that combining advertising with content texts enables students to bridge distances among the often artificial world of the classroom and "real" experiences in life settings. For instance, after several of my high school students noted the invisibility of Native Americans in both mainstream media and their own history texts, they engaged in academic and community research to gather additional information for their peers.

Finally, making textual connections assists students to forge cohesive understandings and develop sound literacy strategies for all modern media and communicational environments. The following anecdote illustrates this point.

Last week, a student approached me before class. She excitedly told me:

> I actually used the stuff [visual analysis] we learned in here [the class]... I was watching tv and I started thinking about t h e categories, like how they were using space and timing and who was there and who wasn't there and what it all meant... I got really critical! ... I started seeing things I'd never noticed before and thinking about them in different ways. ... I like this class because you teach us useful things, like things you don't just use at school...things you can use now but you also apply out in the real world ...You're showing us that literacy is more than books and boring lessons... It's alot bigger and alot more connected than I used to think it was.

This student's account shows how she is making meaningful connections among literacy texts, practices, learning and environments. It is my hope that this article may offer positive directions for other students and teachers, as they quest for cohesive understandings of modern literacy.

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